Associations Between Food Insecurity and Neighborhood Safety, Social Cohesion, Social Control, and Crime Among Mothers of Preschool-aged Children

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Food insecurity has myriad associations with poor health, and low-income communities have higher than average prevalence of food insecurity. Living in a supportive neighborhood social environment may protect against food insecurity, while adverse neighborhood social conditions, such as crime, may increase the likelihood of food insecurity. To examine associations between food insecurity and neighborhood social factors among families with young children, we administered a cross-sectional survey to 300 mothers and female caregivers of Medicaid-enrolled two- to four-year-old children in Philadelphia. We used multivariable regression to examine associations between food insecurity and perceived neighborhood safety, social cohesion, informal social control, and crime, adjusted for demographics, socioeconomic status, and neighborhood characteristics. Lower food insecurity prevalence was associated with higher perceived neighborhood safety and social cohesion, and lower police-recorded violent crime rates. Future work to increase food security among low-income households may benefit from targeting the neighborhood social environment.

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